

REGULAR meeting of the Board of Equal Rights Commission held
Wednesday, March 20, 2013 in room 301-A of City Hall
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

PRESENT: Jeffrey Roman, Chair
Linda Reaves, Vice Chair
Chez Ordonez
Aldira Aldape
Kristen Donat

EXCUSED: Mayhoua Moua

Staff: Maria Monteagudo, Employee Relations Director
Rebecca Reyes Duke, HR Compliance Officer

Excused: MaryNell Regan, Assistant City Attorney

Chairperson Roman called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

Agenda Item #1

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the February 14, 2013, Equal Rights Commission meeting were approved.
(Ordonez/Donat)

Agenda Item #2

Welcome New Commissioners

The Commissioners welcome the two newest members appointed to the ERC. Ms. Aldira Aldape, Director of Bilingual Social and Immigration Services at Centro Hispano; and, Ms. Kristen Donat, Youth Program Coordinator at Milwaukee LGBT Community Center, each gave a brief introduction and both were warmly welcomed to the ERC.

Agenda Item #3

**Follow-Up Discussion regarding February 20th Meeting with Community Organizers
Community Block Grant Administration (CBGA) – Matthew Balistrieri**

In follow up to the CBGA proposal presented to the ERC at their January meeting, the ERC and staff met with the Community Organizers to brainstorm on how to move forward and implement the ideas brought forth in said proposal. Ms. Monteagudo stated that this was a good meeting that started a little rough, as the Community Organizers were not quite sure who we were and why we were at their meeting, but eventually, the group opened up about what it is they are seeing and hearing from the residents in their assigned neighborhoods and provided the ERC a broad

overview of issues that they deal with on a regular basis. One of the main issues brought forth had to do with landlord/tenant issues as it relates to the legal rights of tenants. The Organizers said that although they have good relationships with Legal Aid, Hope House, the Community Prosecution Unit and certain city departments, it would still be helpful to have a pamphlet or brochure--something that they can physically give to residents-- that specifically addresses tenant rights and provides direction on how to file a complaint against a landlord for violation of rights issues. Further discussion took place relating to forming a collaborative partnership with the ERC and the Organizers and which type of issues could be addressed through this partnership. As a result of this first meeting, the ERC put together a "To Do" list including, but not limited to, creating a set of pamphlets relating to equal rights; setting up meetings with a smaller focus group of the organizers; attending neighborhood meetings; and meeting with the Legal Aid Society.

Chairperson Roman was in attendance at that meeting and added that he wants to make sure that this was not the first and last time that we meet with the Community Organizers and that we keep the momentum going with this partnership. He stated that he will be attending some of the neighborhood meetings and would like to see this gain momentum over the summer.

Commissioner Ordonez was in attendance as well and added that he would like to solidify the scope of authority that the ERC has in relation to this partnership and learn more about how Milwaukee Metropolitan Fair Housing and Legal Aid play a role.

Ms. Monteagudo stated that a main component of this partnership will have to include some type of training for the Community Organizers (CO's) regarding tenant rights. She asked the Commissioners to look in their packet of information for this meeting and referred to a handout from the Tenant Resource Center (TRC) located in Madison, WI. She said that the TRC offers training in the area of tenant rights, for a fee, and thought it might be worth exploring. In addition to the TRC offering training, they also have a variety of pamphlets and brochures that the ERC may be able to utilize as part of a packet that the CO's could give to residents. By utilizing the TRC, we can address the need for training as well as providing tangible information that residents can refer to as needed. Ms. Monteagudo stated that after looking at everything the TRC offers, she felt that it would be beneficial for Matthew Balistrieri to be at this meeting as he oversees the Community Organizers activities. She stated that although this approach is a little different than having the Metropolitan Fair Housing Council conduct training, there is still an opportunity to strengthen that relationship by implementing the formal referral process that was discussed. Ms. Monteagudo asked for Mr. Balistrieri's input.

Mr. Balistrieri stated that the Community Organizers are expected to know a lot of information about a lot of different subjects. He stated that CO's make door-to-door contact and are never sure what they will encounter. He stated that the ideas that have been presented today are something that they have not keyed in on before, but he liked what he was hearing.

Ms. Monteagudo replied that this seems to be an area of concern from the CO's and that it is something that we can work on now and use some of the resources that the ERC has been given for this year.

She then asked the Commissioners to take a look at the packet of information regarding the Metropolitan Fair Housing Council (MMFHC). She said that one of the questions that the CO's asked is "what does a complaint look like?" In looking at the MMFHC webpage, she came across a page that gives real-life examples of complaints; from the process it goes through all the way to the end result. She said that it may be helpful to utilize some of the content of this page in the construction of the pamphlets we have been discussing.

Chairperson Roman asked for any questions/comments.

Commissioner Ordonez said that the information looks good and asked about the status of the referral form and brochures that had been discussed.

A discussion ensued regarding the status of the website reconstruction, the types of brochures that need to be drafted, the online/hard copy referral form and a timeline for completion of all of the above.

Commissioner Roman suggested having everything completed by the end of May or June to be ready for a summer rollout.

Ms. Monteagudo stated that once a draft is completed, in addition to the Commissioners reviewing it, she asked Mr. Balistreri if he would identify five of the CO's to also take a look at the draft and get feedback from them.

Mr. Balistreri stated that he is willing to do that.

Ms. Reyes Duke stated that she can have a draft ready for the April meeting and it can then be finalized for the May meeting.

Ms. Monteagudo stated in summary to this discussion, there are three things to be drafted for review at the April meeting: (1) A draft brochure/pamphlet about who we are and what we do; (2) A draft brochure/pamphlet regarding housing discrimination/tenant rights; (3) A draft referral/tracking mechanism for online use. The goal is to have all three finalized by the end of May.

Some additional conversation was had regarding formatting and content issues related to the brochures. Ms. Monteagudo then asked the Commissioners to refer to their packets and take a look at the information related to the "211" website. She stated that a few years ago, a former ERC Commissioner, who was an intern at the time, put together a similar database of community resources that the ERC had launched on their website with the same intent of "211". She asked if the Commissioners were familiar with the site.

All but one of the Commissioners had heard of the "211" resource and suggested that we add a link to the ERC website.

Commissioner Aldape added that "211" has a physical office located at 611 West National Avenue that accepts walk-ins.

Chairperson Roman asked for any final comments or questions. Hearing none, he moved onto the next agenda item.

Agenda Item #4

Briefing from Kathy Smith of the Legal Aid Society

Ms. Monteagudo began by introducing Kathy Smith of the Legal Aid Society (LAS) and thanked her for patiently waiting through the first part of the meeting. Ms. Monteagudo said that as a result of meeting with the aforementioned Community Organizers that the ERC had intended on touching base with the LAS to find out what the role the organization plays in relation housing

discrimination complaints. She stated that she was able to extend a personal invitation to Ms. Smith to attend this meeting after meeting her at the March meeting of the Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission, which Ms. Smith is a member of. With that, Ms. Monteagudo turned it over to Ms. Smith.

Ms. Smith began with an overview of the Legal Aid Society. She said that the LAS has been around since 1960 and began as a social service agency. Over the years it has grown and is now the 13th largest law firm in the State of Wisconsin with 24 lawyers on staff and 18 social workers and a large support staff. She said that the LAS handles all types of legal issues such as landlord/tenant issues, mortgage foreclosures, bankruptcy, family law (guardian ad litem issues), and class action suits. She added that the only area they don't handle is criminal law.

Commissioner Aldape asked if home mortgage cases that they handle are preventative.

Ms. Smith said that the goal is to keep the homeowner in their home, and have a great track record in doing so, but that is not always the case.

Ms. Monteagudo asked if the Legal Aid Society has any kind of working relationship with the Milwaukee Metropolitan Fair Housing Council.

Ms. Smith stated that they really don't have a working relationship with MMFHC as they do more educational work rather than legal work.

A discussion was had regarding what the MMFHC does in comparison to the LAS and the accountability that is tied to the funding that each receives through the City's Community Block Grant Administration (CBGA).

Commissioner Roman asked what role the ERC plays in ensuring that the accountability component is being addressed.

Ms. Monteagudo stated that the accountability goes back to agency providing the funding; in this case, the CBGA. She added that this goes back to the proposal that Steve Mahan presented to the ERC, and the ability to refer complaints to MMFHC and requiring some type of tracking of the complaint to the point of resolution. The MMFHC will be accountable to CBGA, and the ERC should help set the agenda to meet the objectives and deliverables required given the funding allocation.

Chairperson Roman stated that this is something that the ERC will have to have further discussions on internally to get a better grasp on the accountability tied to city funding.

Ms. Monteagudo then asked Ms. Smith what the ERC can do to support what the LAS is doing.

Ms. Smith replied that the ERC can help by getting the word out that the LAS is there to help. She said they have an office on 8th street and have open intake on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. where anyone can walk in and meet with an attorney regarding a legal issue.

Ms. Monteagudo asked Ms. Smith if she could think of any specific area that the ERC and LAS could pool their resources and alleviate some of the pressure that the LAS is under.

Ms. Smith could not think of something specific at this time, but said that if she does think of something she would let the ERC know.

Ms. Monteagudo stated that because Ms. Smith is also a board member of the Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission (MCHRC), and that the ERC and MCHRC will be attending the other's meetings, that there will be an open dialogue between the two commissions. She said that there may be issues that the two commissions can collaborate on and build a partnership moving forward.

Chairperson Roman asked for any final questions/comments for Ms. Smith and/or Mr. Balistreri. Hearing none, he and the ERC thanked both for their attendance and input before moving on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item #5

Follow-Up Discussion regarding Meeting with the Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission (MCHRC)

Chairperson Roman received an email from MCHRC Commissioner Jason Rae, the sitting Chair of the MCHRC, inviting ERC Commissioners to their March 6th commission meeting to provide an update on what the City of Milwaukee ERC is doing and how the two commissions may be able to work together in the future. Ms. Monteagudo, Chairperson Roman and Vice Chair Reaves all attended the meeting. Chairperson Roman said that they had a good discussion on the things that they do, the things that we do and how we can work together to form a partnership between the city and county to further equal rights issues.

Ms. Monteagudo added that to kick off this partnership, Vice Chair Reaves volunteered to Chair a committee to plan a joint city/county Human Rights Day Celebration to take place in December of this year. She said that if others are interested in being on that committee, to let Linda know.

Chairperson Roman said that since that meeting, Jason Rae has again reached out to continue this dialogue, but that he has not yet responded because he wanted to have this meeting first and give other commissioners an opportunity to reach out as well.

Ms. Monteagudo stated that the MCHRC does have a schedule of meetings to be held. She added that they are holding their meetings in community locations and will get the schedule and locations and will communicate that to the Commissioners once received. She said it would be good to have at least one commissioner attend each meeting to further this partnership.

Ms. Monteagudo said that what she found really interesting about the MCHRC meeting were the two guests that were there. One was a professor from UWM that discussed the issues related to the re-entry population. She said that she will have Ms. Reyes Duke email a copy of the handout that provided as this is the same issue that this ERC had addressed last summer in working with Clarence Johnson of Wisconsin Community Services. The other guest was Denise Wooten who talked about the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program (BNCP). Ms. Monteagudo turned it back over to Chairperson Roman as he attended a follow-up meeting related to that program.

Chairperson Roman said that there are three neighborhood groups that received the funding tied to this program. This particular meeting that he attended was hosted by the Imani Neighborhood group and turned out to be more a community focus group rather than an informational session. Chairperson Roman said that it was a great learning experience and he plans on attending the other two agencies community focus meetings and has reached out to Denise Wooten for information on those meetings. He added that he has also reached out to the Washington Park

Partners group that has received funding from the BYRNE program which is similar to that of the BNCP. Chairperson Roman said that he will send out the information for both programs so that other Commissioners can become involved as a part of our community outreach efforts.

Chairperson Roman then asked for any further questions and/or comments. Hearing none, he moved on to the next agenda item.

Agenda Item #6

Update on Proposed Logos for the ERC

At the last meeting of the ERC, Tina Klose had presented a series of options to choose from for a new ERC logo. After narrowing down the choices, the Commissioners asked for some modifications to be made prior to making a final decision. The modifications had been made and after reviewing, the Commissioners would like to see another change before voting. Ms. Reyes Duke will communicate the changes to Ms. Klose and a final decision will be made at the next ERC meeting.

Agenda Item #7

Commissioner Community Updates

No updates to report at this time.

Agenda Item #8

Next Meeting Date(s)

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the ERC is set for Wednesday, Monday, April 15th, 2013 at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m. (Reaves/Ordonez)